

Head Start Leads to Success

Justine Balauro

Aloha, my name is Justine Balauro. I'm from Hawaii on the island of Kaua'i, and I'm in district of Lihu'e – the Kaua'i Head Start is located. My daughters: Jasmine, which is five; Jen and Jess is twins, which is – they're four. I've been in the Head Start for about – going on three years now, and has been really beneficial in my part because I've grown as an individual to be inspired to leadership skills, and become a better mom, parenting, education.

I'm on the Policy Council to represent my daughters' center. I'm the chairperson of the Policy Council and I'm the board representative of the Kaua'i Head Start at this time. And it all started when my daughter was three years old. I enrolled her into Head Start but it was past the enrollment date; but I was put on the waitlist, and within two weeks they sent me a letter and enrolled my daughter into a – into one of their centers. And from there, I've learned to be more – more active with involvement and participating with my child's centers, and just getting out there in the community and helping the parents become better parents too.

And it's been really, really exciting being with the program itself. I get speechless when I explain myself because there's so much that I've been through that has helped me with. My advocate, Laney Carvolial, she's helped me through a lot with sufficient housing, getting me the correct resources I needed to get to get to where I need to be, to build – build stability in my household, shelter, food, necessities. It's just been really touching to be in the program and get the resources when you need it.

And it's just been so fulfilling being at the program. And I'd advise all my parents into the community that Head Start is an awesome program to be in, beneficial to the parents to grow as – to become better parents to their children, better involvement. And to their – for their children, they – they'll learn to be socializing, to develop physical – physical health, and school kindergarten readiness. And I think that's what a child needs; very important for them in the beginning stages of their lives. I encourage learning by sitting groups.

I have three daughters, so I have them sit in a circle and we do zoo-phonics. I would print out – I would do print outs with letters, numbers, and I wouldn't – I would just flip the pages and have them play card games, or we do number concepts. I have piggy banks in their rooms, and they would take out coins and I would have them count – count me out maybe three coins, or count me out five coins, or I would put my fingers up and say, "2+2 is...," and they would answer me.

And it's just... Having the older one be the role model for the four-year-olds is – is tremendous, like very – like good when you have older siblings that play the role model for the younger siblings.